

NSC BRIEFING

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**GUATEMALA**

- I. If current trends continue through the 19 January national elections, the Communist-infiltrated Revolutionary party is likely to win an important victory in Guatemala. The Communists would then be in a position to consolidate and expand their influence until they again dominate the government.
  - A. There are numerous indications that Communists have become very active again and are increasing both in boldness and intensity their moves to regain positions of power and influence.
    1. At least 15 exiled associates of ex-president Arbenz have returned clandestinely in past month; at least 5 of them Communists. In addition, in early November Guatemalan government authorized return of 18 more, ten of whom considered dangerous by US. Government says total of some 100 of remaining 600 will be permitted back in next several months.
    2. Arbenz himself in Uruguay since last May. Was in Soviet Bloc September 1955-October 1956. Two daughters still believed attending school in Moscow, despite efforts by Arbenz and wife to have them returned to them.
    3. There is reason to believe that the Communists will receive guidance and support from the Soviet government and the ~~International Communist organization.~~
  - B. Election of successor to Castillo Armas, for a 6-year term, and of half of congress is set for 19 January.

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1. Similar elections 20 October were annulled after concerted rightist-leftist mob action against "fraudulent" election of administration candidate.
  2. Interim Gonzalez regime resigned under army pressure and replaced by interim President Flores Avendano, whose government, though anti-Communist, is much more tolerant of leftist activity.
- C. Communist-infiltrated Revolutionary Party (PR) is now the country's strongest.
1. Chief strength comes from its embodiment of the still widely popular democratic, nationalist ideals of the 1944 revolution.
  2. Despite PR leaders' denials Communists are active in lower echelons of PR and control of the PR is a prime Communist target.
  3. PR threatens demonstrations, uprising if denied right to participate in election and could cause serious violence.
- D. Anti-Communist political forces seem almost irretrievably divided.
1. The rightist Miguel Ydigoras Fuentes, who is convinced that he was the rightful winner of the October election, adamantly refuses to sacrifice his candidacy in the interests of anti-Communist unity, but he is unacceptable to most army officers and to moderate political elements.

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2. Army officers and moderate politicians are trying to form a centrist coalition to oppose both the PR and Ydigoras, but cannot agree on a candidate. (Lt. Col. Jose Luis Cruz Salazar, 37-year old ambassador to Washington, is the leading contender.)
- E. A center candidate probably could not win the required absolute majority of votes in a contest with both the PR and Ydigoras unless he benefited from fraud or had obvious government-military support.
  1. Such fraud or favoritism would probably set off a repetition of the October violence, which the army might be unable or unwilling to control.
- F. Conviction growing in army that only solution is military coup.
  1. However, army is seriously weakened by factionalism and lack of effective leadership.
  2. A military government would have to deal with violent pretexts against any postponement of elections.
- II. Return of pro-Communist regime in Guatemala would be very damaging to United States prestige in Latin America and more generally throughout the world.
  - A. US Ambassador Hill in Mexico has expressed serious alarm.
- III. Crisis brewing in neighboring Honduras as ambitious defense minister attempts to force majority Liberal Party into accepting him as strongman.

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